

Theoretical and Empirical Basis for CIB
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Children in Between is an educational program based upon several theories. The content and instructional design was designed according to social cognitive theory, family systems theory, and Amato's divorce-stress-adjustment theory. The program is heavily skills-focused and it is based on risk and protective factors for child adjustment following divorce or separation of their parents.

Social cognitive theory influenced several of the instructional methods in the program. The use of video modeling, where parents identify with the parents in the video scenes, to teach skills is the primary mechanism of skill attainment. Social reinforcement occurs when parents demonstrate effective communication and problem solving skills, as well as effective anger control strategies. Ineffective parenting and co-parenting methods are criticized in the program, providing negative consequences for the use of these methods. Parents learn to reframe their co-parent's motives so that they do not develop their usual anger, attack and counterattack cycles. Parents also learn to plan their interactions prior to engaging with their co-parent through the use of self-talk.

Family systems theory influenced the view that the family system continues after separation or divorce, but across two households.^{1 2} Family members are interdependent, such that conflict between parents affects children, and parents and children build coalitions to increase their power, which can involve triangulating where a parent and child are teamed up against the other parent. Triangulation and coalition building are particularly common family systems patterns in conflicted, separating families (Kitzmann, 2000). The program points out these triangulating strategies and discourages their use. The need for specific rules and boundaries is stated as the family must restructure after divorce and separation.

The Divorce-Stress-Adjustment (D-S-A) perspective, based on the most widely recognized theories and empirical studies, conceptualizes dissolution of a marriage or a cohabiting relationship beginning well before the dissolution and continuing past legal and practical decisions (Amato, 2000). The stress involved in the dissolution process increases the risk of negative emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes for parents and children. Parents experience stress related to changes in parenting demands, access to children, and co-parenting interactions. This stress affects their parenting practices their interactions with the co-parent. Variability exists in child and parent adjustment to relationship dissolution; that is, some experience it as a short-term crisis from which they recover or even exceed pre-dissolution levels of well-being, while others never regain the pre-dissolution levels of well-being and even continue a downward trajectory of chronic strain. Two primary mediators of children's trajectory are parenting practices and level of co-parental conflict (Amato, 2000; Hetherington, Bridges, & Isabella, 1998). Negative child outcomes are mediated through parenting and co-parenting conflict (Kelly, 2010; Kelly & Emory, 2003). The pile-up of daily stressors can compromise parenting and increase co-parenting conflict. Separated parents are susceptible to increased irritability, harsher discipline,

1 Emery, R. E., & Dillon, P. (1994). Conceptualizing the divorce process: Renegotiating boundaries of intimacy and power in the divorced family system. *Family Relations*, 43(4), 374-379. 16

2 Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

conflict with children, and decreases in effective communication, affection, control, and monitoring (Amato, 2000; Hetherington, 2003). Effective parenting and low-conflict co-parenting are protective factors that reduce the risk of negative outcomes for children (Kelly & Emery 2003). Protective factors weaken the connections between parental separation and subsequent stress, and parental separation and negative outcomes (Amato, 2000).

Empirical Basis for CIB

The content in CIB was empirically based. Content was chosen because it was supported by controlled research that showed a link between certain parental behaviors and parent's adjustment and children's adjustment. For example, content was informed by research on the negative effects of parental conflict on children, the negative effect of lack of involvement of one or both parents in the children's lives, and the characteristics of high quality coparenting relationships. The detrimental effects of poor monitoring, unclear and coercive communication, and lack of empathy are pointed out. The protective effects of close monitoring, attentive listening and involvement with children, and consistent, respectful discipline are illustrated. Research showing parental personal adjustment suffered (depression, anxiety, anger, substance abuse, interpersonal problems) when parents could not control their conflict, and experienced unsatisfying relationships with their children and former partner led us to focus on teaching parents conflict management and communication skills and attitudes that fostered cooperation and compromise.

After creating the CIB program, ten years of research has established that the empirically-based content and instructional design has achieved the objectives of improved co-parenting cooperation, reduced parental conflict, and improved child outcomes.

By teaching parents to remove children from the middle of their conflict, CIB encourages clearer communication and increased warmth between parents and children. CIB group format has been effective in reducing co-parental conflict by improving communication, decreasing exposure of children to interparental conflict, and reducing relitigation rates. Compared to control parents, CIB parents were more adept in figuring out how to approach difficult parenting situations with a former partner (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996). Another court-based study compared effects on parental communication of CIB with those of an information-based program and a control group. Only CIB parents showed improved non-conflictual interparental communication. Also, parents in CIB treatment groups reported they were less likely than parents in comparison or control groups to expose their children to interparental conflict (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996; Arbuthnot, Poole, & Gordon, 1996; Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis, & Hoza, 1998, Gillard & Seymour, 2005). Two studies of CIB found that CIB parents were half as likely than control group parents to relitigate child support, parenting plans, and access issues (Arbuthnot, Kramer, & Gordon, 1997). Judges perceived CIB group format to reduce relitigation rates and positively influence parental attitudes and sensitivity to children (Arbuthnot, Segal, Gordon, & Schneider, 1994). Studies on CIB have shown it to facilitate the nonresidential parent's involvement with children. Compared with parents in control groups, CIB parents reported more willingness to allow children time with the co-parent (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1995; Arbuthnot, Kramer, & Gordon, 1997; Arbuthnot, Poole, & Gordon, 1996). Several studies have shown improvements in children's adjustment following parents' use of CIB (Gillard & Seymour, 2005; Arbuthnot, Poole, & Gordon, 1996).